Amendment Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and under Water

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 8th MEETING

Held at United Nations Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 11 January 1991, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. ALATAS (Indonesia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. BILOA TANG (Cameroon) said that, since the signing of the partial test-ban Treaty, the number of nuclear tests had in fact increased. Despite the commitments made by the parties to the Treaty, no decisive measures had been adopted, either by the Conference on Disarmament or within the framework of bilateral or trilateral negotiations, to bring and end to nuclear-weapon testing. The continuation of an unbridled arms race, based on the policy of nuclear deterrence, had consumed vast economic and financial resources, while the countries of the third world continued to face non-nuclear threats such as hunger, poverty, debt, illiteracy and disease.

2. Accordingly, the Amendment Conference offered the first opportunity in many years to initiate into serious multilateral negotiations with a view to the adoption of a comprehensive test-ban treaty. In view of the marked improvement in the international climate, the time had come to adopt such a treaty. That was the only way to ensure the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and to prevent the pollution of the seas, the atmosphere and outer space. He welcomed the progress made in recent years in the field of disarmament, as shown by the INF Treaty and the verification protocols signed by the United States and the Soviet Union. On that basis, the Amendment Conference should be able to overcome difficulties and differences in approach so as to achieve the goal of a comprehensive test ban.

3. The international community had acquired solid experience in the verification of compliance with disarmament agreements. It was now recognized that, with existing technology, compliance with a comprehensive test ban could be verified with a high degree of accuracy.

4. For that reason, he was convinced that a comprehensive, universal and verifiable nuclear test ban could be achieved. The Amendment Conference was the only forum in which States parties could discuss the conversion of the partial test-ban Treaty into a comprehensive test-ban treaty. It was important, therefore, to seize the opportunity thus afforded to strengthen international co-operation and dialogue with regard to such a crucial issue, rather than deferring consideration of the matter to other, small bodies or choosing the so-called step-by-step approach. That approach had two drawbacks: it did not prevent the qualitative development of nuclear weapons, and it postponed indefinitely the multilateral negotiations which could lead to a complete and immediate ban.

5. U THAUNG TUN (Myanmar) said that, 27 years after the signing of the partial test-ban Treaty and 20 years after the entry into force of the non-proliferation Treaty, the world was no closer to a comprehensive test ban. That was all the more disappointing in that the parties to the partial test-ban Treaty had committed themselves to seeking an end to nuclear-weapon-test explosions for all time. Discussions of a comprehensive test ban had been carried on bilaterally, trilaterally and multilaterally, but the meetings in question had been unproductive.

(U Thaung Tun, Myanmar)

6. His country, like the majority of States attending the Amendment Conference, attached great importance to a nuclear test ban and had supported all efforts to achieve a comprehensive and verifiable ban since 1962. If such a vital step towards disarmament had not been taken, it was not for lack of sustained efforts on the part of the international community; rather, it was because the depository States had failed to fulfil their obligations under the partial test-ban Treaty and the non-proliferation Treaty. Regrettably, those States still regarded a comprehensive test ban as a goal to be achieved later rather than sooner. That was why no tangible results had been achieved despite the General Assembly's adoption of some 70 resolutions on the issue. Similar efforts within the Conference on Disarmament had also been thwarted, and even the establishment within that body of an ad hoc committee on a nuclear test ban with a proper negotiating mandate had persistently been blocked. Although mention was frequently made of the successful bilateral negotiations which had led to the signing of the threshold test-ban Treaty and the peaceful nuclear explosions Treaty, those instruments were more concerned with setting agreed limits to the explosive yields of underground tests than with banning such tests.

7. Paradoxically, the States which currently counselled a step-by-step approach were the very ones which in 1962 had stated that a comprehensive test-ban treaty was the key to disarmament, since it would be an important first step in bringing the arms race under control. Despite such declarations, a comprehensive test ban had not been achieved, allegedly because of differences with regard to the number of on-site inspections.

8. For the first time since the invention of nuclear weapons, serious efforts were being made to curb the unbridled nuclear-arms race. Negotiations on the reduction of strategic arms were making encouraging headway. While recent developments had given rise to hopes for a more peaceful world, the international community should not lose sight of the dangers that still lay ahead. The world was threatened with conflicts which might destabilize global peace. The threat of war looming over the Gulf region served as a reminder of the possibility that weapons of mass destruction might be used in an open conflict. The task of achieving nuclear disarmament was therefore more urgent than ever.

9. At the current stage, nuclear tests served only to develop new and more effective weapons of mass destruction. The time had come to discard outmoded doctrines and overcome suspicions bred by ideological rivalry and military confrontation. There was broad agreement that a comprehensive and verifiable test ban would be a vital step towards bringing about a world free of nuclear weapons. Although the difficulties relating to verification were real and formidable, they were not insurmountable and should no longer be used as a pretext for failing to take action. Accordingly, current efforts must continue in order to bring about a breakthrough towards a comprehensive test ban.

10. Mr. ALCANTARA (Dominican Republic) said that, while his country had never participated in the nuclear-arms race, it had always expressed its concern at the threat which nuclear weapons posed to mankind and to the world environment. His country had voiced its opposition to the nuclear-arms race in all international

(Mr. Alcantara, Dominican Republic)

forums and had unconditionally supported the non-proliferation Treaty and the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (Treaty of Tlatelolco).

11. As a result of nuclear weapons, the world was divided in various ways: between nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States; between nuclear-weapon States which believed that testing was necessary and States which believed that all nuclear tests should be discontinued in order to prevent the qualitative development of nuclear weapons and to discourage their inclusion in military deterrence strategies; between States which could not agree to a comprehensive test ban because they did not trust the existing verification mechanisms and States which feared that in the future only nuclear weapons would be reliable, and that they would be used on the battlefield at the first opportunity; between nuclear-weapon States which were determined to prevent other countries from developing such weapons, even at the risk of nuclear war, and other States - the majority - which were promoting the concept of a comprehensive test ban as an important step towards the ultimate goal of world-wide nuclear disarmament.

12. Until such time as a comprehensive test-ban treaty could be signed, the nuclear-weapon States should unilaterally suspend all nuclear-test explosions and pursue all efforts to negotiate such a treaty under the auspices of the Amendment Conference, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 45/50. He also supported the idea of including in the provisional agenda of the Assembly's forty-sixth session an item entitled "Amendment to the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and under Water". The prohibition of underground nuclear tests would help to slow the development of new nuclear weapons and would substantially reduce nuclear arsenals. It would also strengthen the efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation and would reduce the risks of future environmental pollution.

13. In view of the complex and sensitive nature of the issues under discussion at the Amendment Conference, particularly the question of verification, there was a need for prolonged discussions and negotiations in order to persuade the nuclear-weapon States to declare a moratorium on testing while the details of verification were being worked out. For that reason, the Amendment Conference should not take a final vote on the question under consideration, but should agree to reconvene in a year or two, having established a working group to co-ordinate matters in the mean time.

14. Mr. ALMUAKKAF (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the accumulation of nuclear arsenals, far from constituting a deterrent, increased the risks of a devastating war. The objective to which all must aspire was a comprehensive nuclear-test ban subject to effective international verification.

15. The cold war had given way to an era of unprecedented harmony in international relations, yet it had still not been possible to eliminate the threats posed to international peace and security by the existence of enormous quantities of weapons of mass destruction. Those threats were increased by the continued production,

(Mr. Almuakkaf, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

development, stockpiling and testing of nuclear arms by the nuclear-weapon States. His delegation therefore attached particular importance to the speedy conclusion of a comprehensive test-ban treaty. The States parties to the non-proliferation Treaty had stated their determination to conclude such a treaty at the earliest opportunity but the nuclear-weapon States were not displaying the political will required for such action. His delegation urged all States to take appropriate measures to end the testing of nuclear weapons as a matter of urgency.

16. The considerable progress made in negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union concerning reductions in their strategic offensive arms, as well as their conventional forces in Europe, was to be welcomed. The Conference on Disarmament, as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community, had a major role to play in bringing about a comprehensive nuclear-test ban. His delegation hoped that the newly re-established Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban would begin work immediately with a broader mandate. It also supported the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in different parts of the world.

17. Noting the complementary relationship between the partial test-ban Treaty and the non-proliferation Treaty, his delegation hoped that the current Conference would succeed in formulating a comprehensive test-ban treaty which would provide similar support for the non-proliferation Treaty. Such hopes would, however, remain remote so long as two nuclear-weapon States refused to join in the agreement on such a ban. In that connection, his delegation regretted that the Fourth Review Conference for the non-proliferation Treaty had failed to agree on a final declaration.

18. In conclusion, his country attached particular importance to the establishment of machinery for the effective verification of all nuclear tests. Following the improvement of seismic techniques, which constituted the best means of monitoring tests at the international level, there could be no justification for the arguments against a comprehensive ban advanced by certain nuclear-weapon States.

19. Mr. FUENTES IBAÑEZ (Bolivia) said that, since the signing of the partial test-ban Treaty, no progress had been made towards banning nuclear-weapon tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water. Furthermore, the formal commitment to establish verification of underground nuclear tests, which was now feasible, had not been carried out. With the assistance of the International Atomic Energy Agency it would not be difficult to set up a data bank in order to ensure reliable verification.

20. The countries that conducted nuclear-weapon tests invoked security reasons to justify such tests. However, now that the cold war had come to an end, there was no justification for increasing nuclear arsenals to serve as a deterrent to war. Nuclear deterrence was based on terror and constituted a violation of State sovereignty. In view of the preliminary disarmament agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union and the new atmosphere of international co-operation

(Mr. Fuentes Ibañez, Bolivia)

and mutual trust, conditions were propitious for amending the partial test-ban Treaty. To that end, the structure of the Amendment Conference should be maintained and work should continue so that the Conference could be reconvened at the latest in 1992.

21. Mr. PEDAUYE (Spain) said that Spain had supported the vast majority of United Nations resolutions calling for a comprehensive nuclear-test ban, particularly the proposals put forward by Australia and New Zealand in the First Committee every year since 1972. Since 1964, Spain had been a party to the partial test-ban Treaty. In 1986, it had acceded to the non-proliferation Treaty.

22. The partial-test-ban Treaty was outstanding in that the number of States parties to it had steadily increased and its provisions had never been violated. One reason for its success was that it was realistic and pragmatic. Operating on the premise that a complete cessation of nuclear testing could not be achieved overnight, its approach was less ambitious and sought to achieve the desired goal in stages.

23. Perhaps the most substantive obstacle to a comprehensive ban had to do with the complex and delicate balance of current international security arrangements. His delegation was convinced the conclusion of a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty was closely linked to achieving progress in the field of nuclear disarmament. In that connection, the best approach would be a gradual one. Therefore, the sudden conversion of the partial test-ban Treaty into a comprehensive nuclear test-ban Treaty did not seem realistic for the time being. For one thing, it would exclude two of the five nuclear-weapon Powers, which were not parties to the partial test-ban Treaty. Moreover, a total cessation of testing which left arsenals intact until they became obsolete, could actually be destabilizing and increase nuclear risks.

24. His delegation had actively participated in the preparatory work for the Conference out of support for its underlying ideals. Spain was convinced, however, that in the immediate future the Conference served more as a valuable forum for the exchange of views than as a means to achieving a comprehensive ban.

25. Recent years had witnessed historic developments in the quest for disarmament. Outstanding among those developments was the conclusion of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty), signed at Paris eight weeks earlier, the joint declaration by States parties of the two major military alliances, and the Charter of Paris for a new Europe, also signed at the Paris Summit Meeting of Heads of State or Government of the States participating in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. The INF Treaty, concluded in 1987, and its verification protocols had given fresh impetus to the disarmament process after 20 relatively uneventful years. The imminent conclusion of the first treaty substantially reducing strategic nuclear arms (START) and the re-establishment by the Conference on Disarmament of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban were also encouraging signs.

26. In the light of those developments, the Conference could serve as a catalyst for achieving a substantial reduction in nuclear arsenals and fostering specific

(Mr. Pedauye, Spain)

measures for a comprehensive test ban. Initiatives proposed by a number of delegations could be explored, such as timing of nuclear testing at greater intervals, reducing the thresholds permitted in each explosion and setting a nuclear-test ceiling which would decrease annually.

27. Mr. LEGWAILA (Botswana) said that his country attached the utmost importance to the partial test-ban Treaty and believed that the Amendment Conference provided an opportunity to explore ways of achieving a comprehensive nuclear-test ban. The Conference was taking place at a time of dynamic change throughout the world. The end of the cold war and other positive developments had given rise to the hope that mankind had emerged from the era marked by the balance of terror.

28. The ultimate objective of the Conference should be a comprehensive nuclear-test ban. Halting all nuclear tests was the only credible way to ensure nuclear non-proliferation. While not wishing to establish a linkage between the partial test-ban Treaty and the non-proliferation Treaty, Botswana stressed the need to recognize that a situation in which the nuclear-weapon States were allowed to have a monopoly on nuclear weapons was neither desirable nor fair. His country had an open and constructive approach towards the proposed amendment. The Conference should initiate the process of negotiations leading to the signing of a comprehensive test-ban treaty. Botswana would have no difficulty accepting a step-by-step approach to a comprehensive test ban, if the nuclear-weapon States were prepared to commit themselves to that goal.

29. While his delegation was fully aware of the complex relationship between a comprehensive test ban and reliable verification arrangements, as well as the difficulties involved in the verification of compliance with obligations, it was nevertheless, convinced that the advances in science and technology would make it possible to ensure a verifiable nuclear-test ban. Botswana believed that the Amendment Conference had an important role to play in negotiations on a comprehensive test ban and appealed to States parties to the partial test-ban Treaty to ensure that that process was brought to its logical conclusion.

30. Mr. KENYON (United Kingdom) said that, with the total withdrawal of Soviet forces from Eastern Europe and the implementation of the CFE Treaty, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had agreed that it could reduce its reliance on nuclear weapons. NATO members had also agreed, however, that since the future was uncertain, an appropriate combination of nuclear and conventional forces should be maintained. For the United Kingdom, that meant that security would continue to depend on deterrence, based, in part, on nuclear weapons - and that would entail a measure of nuclear testing.

31. While certain delegations might invoke the third preambular paragraph of the partial test-ban Treaty in that regard, his delegation wished to draw attention to the Treaty's second preambular paragraph, which placed a nuclear-test ban in the context of wider disarmament, and seemed to constitute the only realistic approach. The painful truth was that there was no instant means of dismantling nuclear-weapon systems, and that States dependent on such systems required time to

(Mr. Kenyon, United Kingdom)

ensure their security by other means. None the less, his delegation noted the encouraging progress in the area of arms control, including the INF Treaty, the CFE Treaty and the ongoing work towards a START treaty.

32. His delegation disagreed with the view that the possession of nuclear weapons by some States might prompt other States to pursue the same course. A State could develop a crude and highly dangerous weapon without testing, regardless of whether current nuclear-weapon States retained their capability. If the non-proliferation Treaty - to which Iraq was a party, moreover - was already supposed to protect against that eventuality, there was no guarantee that a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty would afford greater security. A more promising solution had been demonstrated in recent months by two nuclear-threshold States which had cast aside competition in favour of co-operating for peaceful purposes.

33. He now wished to comment on the statements by some delegations about the environmental impact of nuclear testing. The partial test-ban Treaty had laid the groundwork for the cessation of testing above ground, and the technology for containing underground testing was highly sophisticated. As a result, the problem of environmental damage at the testing site had been minimized. Indeed, according to a 1989 report from the United States Congress Office of Technology Assessment, total radioactive releases since 1970 would not pose a threat to public health, even in the immediate vicinity of the Nevada test site.

34. With regard to the question of nuclear-treat moratoria, and, in particular, the proposal by President Gorbachev, the United Kingdom was not at present prepared to give up testing. A moratorium would be a poor substitute for a properly-negotiated and effectively-verifiable treaty. Moreover, a moratorium without verification provisions could in itself undermine security.

35. While his delegation did not support converting the partial test-ban Treaty into a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty, it did believe that the exchange of views at the Amendment Conference was a useful exercise. As his delegation had indicated at the Conference on Disarmament, it was not clear that verification of a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty would be fully reliable. While it was possible to distinguish between an earthquake and a nuclear-test explosion at relatively high yields, covert testing remained a distinct possibility. Further discussion of such highly-technical matters should be pursued at the Conference on Disarmament and, in particular, in the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban. For the past 15 years, the United Kingdom had actively participated in the work of the Ad Hoc Group of Scientific Experts of the Conference on Disarmament. While the United Kingdom Government was committed to a comprehensive test ban in the long term, it believed that confidence - in both the technical and the political sense - was a pre-condition for achieving that goal.

CREDENTIALS OF REPRESENTATIVES TO THE CONFERENCE (continued)

(a) APPOINTMENT OF THE CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE (continued)

36. Mr. Peerthum (Mauritius) was elected Vice-Chairman of the Credentials Committee by acclamation.

37. Belgium, Botswana, Colombia, Fiji and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics were appointed members of the Credentials Committee.

38. The PRESIDENT appealed to States parties participating in the Conference that had not already done so to submit their representative's credentials to the Secretary-General of the Conference.

39. Mr. KHERADI (Secretary-General of the Conference) requested States parties that had participated in the Meeting for the Organization of the Conference and those participating in the Amendment Conference which had not already done so to pay their contributions in order to defray the cost of the Conference and the Meeting. Thus far, only a limited number of contributions had been paid. The Conference was not financed from the regular budget of the United Nations but was self-financing. In that connection, he wished to draw attention to rule 12 of the rules of procedure, on cost-sharing, and to the letter dated 20 August 1990 transmitted by the Controller of the United Nations.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.